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ABSTRACT

Information on a study examining the college choice process for academically talented students is presented, focusing on the University of Wisconsin (UW) System's recruitment of All State Academic Scholars. Recognition for academic excellence is the goal of their All State Scholars Program. UW is concerned about a brain drain from the state because nearly half of the 1987 All State Scholars chose to attend college outside Wisconsin. Virtually all researchers of college choice agree institutional characteristics are of primary importance in selecting a college, regardless of student academic ability, and financial constraints are secondary. Other factors include personal considerations, parents, campus qualities, and recruitment tactics. In the UW study, researchers interviewed the 1987 Scholars about factors that helped determine their college choice, their high school programs and college preparation, and the All State Academic Scholars Program. They were asked to discuss family role, friends and counselors, college contacts, personal factors, high school preparation, Byrd Scholarship, recognition via the Scholars Program, family profiles, early plans and decisions, college reputation, and personal attention. Recommendations of the study include early recruitment, focused and direct marketing efforts, promoting academic reputation, employing a personal touch, stressing career interests, confronting the size issue, demystifying scholarships, assuring excellent high school preparation, and doing further research. Contains 29 references. (SM)

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COLLEGE CHOICE AND RECRUITMENT OF WISCONSIN'S ALL STATE ACADEMIC SCHOLARS

A Paper Presented to the

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by

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COLLEGE CHOICE AND RECRUITMENT OF WISCONSIN'S ALL-STATE ACADEMIC SCHOLARS

Recognition for academic excellence is the goal of Wisconsin's All State Scholars Program. The college plans of many of the All State Scholars have been a cause of concern to educators, administrators, the University of Wisconsin Board of Regents, and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. Nearly half of the 1987 All State Scholars chose to attend college outside Wisconsin. Only 39 of 106 scholars chose to attend a University of Wisconsin System campus. These figures prompted a concern about a possible "brain drain" from the state.

Review of the Literature

This concern has been echoed in other states as college admissions officers explore marketing strategies to attract academically talented students (Rickard & Walters, 1984) and legislators consider prepaid tuition plans (Jaschik, 1987). Though little research has been done since the 1960's to determine why students select particular colleges (Kerr & Colangelo, 1988), researchers of the 1980's have begun to investigate the factors that determine college choice for all students applying to colleges in general (Cain & McLintock, 1984; Carnegie Foundation, 1986; Chapman, 1981; Cook & Zallocco, 1983; Erdmann, 1983; Hearn, 1984; Kuntz, 1987; Litten, 1982; Maguire & Lay, 1981; Manski & Wise, 1983; Seneca & Taussig, 1987; Tierney, 1983) and for academically talented students in particular (Chapman & Jackson, 1987; Douglas & Powers, 1985; Douglas,

Powers, & Choroszy, 1983; Higgins, 1984; Jaschik, 1987; Keller & McKeown, 1984; Kerr & Colangelo, 1988; Perrone, in press; Powers & Douglas, 1985; Rickard & Walters, 1984).

A variety of factors have been found to influence college choice for both groups of students. Factors interact to determine their relative importance, depending on individual circumstances. Chapman and Jackson (1987) agree with earlier researchers (Chapman, 1979; Manski & Wise, 1983) that it is impossible to assess the role of any single factor in this complex decision process except as it relates to other factors. Litten (1982) emphasizes that the selection process differs for different types of students. Generally, higher ability students begin the formal application process earlier and consider and apply to more schools than lower ability students. Higher ability students are also more concerned with academic programs and less interested in career outcomes and campus appearance than lower ability students. Seneca and Taussig (1987) add that academically talented students also consider more prestigious schools, especially if they come from high-income families. Tierney (1983) also hypothesizes that academically talented students consider more selective sets of institutions than lower achieving students.

Despite the fact that little is known about how students select college choice sets (Tierney, 1983), general categories of factors have been shown to be influential in the college choice process for all students with slight variability for academically

talented students. General factors revealed through research may be categorized as institutional characteristics, financial constraints, and personal considerations.

Institutional Characteristics

Interestingly, virtually all researchers of college choice agree that institutional characteristics are of primary importance in selecting a college, regardless of the student's academic ability. Institutional characteristics are identified as college quality, reputation, and prestige (Chapman & Jackson, 1987). Most researchers use the terms reputation and quality interchangeably to refer to various components of instruction. They agree that aspects of instruction valued by the student are a major determinant in college choice. Chapman and Jackson (1987) feel that, "Perceived academic quality is consistently the most important consideration for students in all fields of study."

Chapman and Jackson (1987) identify specific components of academic quality as facilities; reputation; availability of special majors, degrees, and honors programs; preparation for careers as well as graduate and professional school opportunities; and strength in areas of individual interest. Other researchers agree that students of all ability levels are attracted by "special curriculum" (Baird, 1967) or "specific academic programs" (Erdmann, 1983; Keller & McKeown, 1984; Maguire & Lay, 1981; Powers & Douglas, 1985; Rickard & Walters, 1984). Keller and McKeown (1984) agree that the success of

graduates in finding jobs or getting into graduate or professional schools is an instrumental reason for attracting academically talented students. In two surveys of high ability students, quality of course instruction was listed as the top priority item in college selection (Douglas & Powers, 1985; Douglas, Powers, & Choroszy, 1983). Academically talented students were especially attracted to programs in their intended majors (Chapman & Jackson, 1987; Douglas & Powers, 1985; Douglas, Powers, & Choroszy, 1983; Keller & McKeown, 1984; Perrone, in press) and honors programs (Kerr & Colangelo, 1988).

Financial Constraints

While institutional characteristics are the primary determinant of college choice for students of all ability levels, financial constraints are generally a secondary consideration. Students consider three financial components in the choice process: expense of the institution, total lower tuition costs, and better financial assistance (Powers & Douglas, 1985). Financial considerations vary among institutions (Douglas, Powers, & Choroszy, 1983; Maguire & Lay, 1981), ability level (Manski & Wise, 1983), and income level of students (Manski & Wise, 1983; Chapman & Jackson, 1987).

Variability of the importance of cost considerations causes researchers to disagree about their relative importance. Most researchers agree that cost is of secondary importance to academic reputation or quality (Chapman, 1981; Chapman & Jackson, 1987; Cook & Zallocco, 1983; Erdmann, 1983; Keller & McKeown,

1984; Kerr & Colangelo, 1988; Manski & Wise, 1983; Nichols, 1966; Rickard & Walters, 1984; Seneca & Taussig, 1987; Tierney, 1983). Some researchers disagree, however, stating that low tuition is an important factor in determining college choice (Anderson, 1976; Chapman, 1979; Murphy, 1981).

Financial Aid. Financial aid, especially scholarship aid, is more influential than the tuition factor in college selection. In a survey of 2500 applicants, financial aid was the most important predictor of attendance at Boston College (Maguire & Lay, 1981). Chapman and Jackson (1987) found better financial aid to be the main reason students in their survey switched from their original choices of colleges. Tierney (1983) found that more able students are more sophisticated about financial issues in choosing a college than students of less ability. Litten (1982) agrees, adding that high ability students are more interested in "net cost" (cost minus aid) than in total cost.

Renewability of Aid. Chapman and Jackson (1987) add the component of renewability of aid, stating that academically talented students pay considerable attention to perceived renewability of financial aid awards when making their final decisions. While downgrading nonrenewable aid, academically talented students view scholarships positively. They add, however, that, "High-income students must be responding to the psychological impact of receiving scholarships; it's not just the money, it's the recognition that goes along with receiving such aid."

Personal Considerations

Following financial constraints in relative importance in the college choice process are personal considerations. There is even more variability in this area than in the matter of finance. However, some common factors emerge as being important in the college choice process. The following factors are viewed as having an impact: people, distance from home, size of the college or university, community and/or campus environment, college publications, personalized recruitment, and campus visits.

Parents. Parents emerge as the most influential people in the decision-making process. There is, however, a great deal of variability in their influence. Parents appear to be more influential for lower ability students (Carnegie Foundation, 1986; Erdmann, 1983; Maguire & Lay, 1981). However, researchers disagree, as Perrone (in press) found parents of top graduates in Wisconsin high schools to be most influential in the choice of a college. Students with more extensive educational goals also work more with their parents in selecting a college (Chapman, 1981). Manski and Wise (1983) concur that parents' education is influential, especially on application to four-year institutions.

Campus Qualities. Distance from home, size of the college or university, and campus/community environment were all influential factors in the college selection process. Though these factors were important, they ranked below academic quality

or specific academic programs in most studies (Chapman & Jackson, 1987; Cook & Zallocco, 1983; Douglas, Powers, & Choroszy, 1983; Erdmann, 1983; Keller & McKeown, 1984; Maquire & Lay, 1981).

Recruitment Tactics. College or university publications, personalized recruitment, and campus visits were seen as instrumental in the decision-making process. Cain and McClintock (1984) describe them as "the most important definers and shapers of student opinion." Personalized recruitment through high school visits, college fairs, campus visits, and post-admissions contacts were found to be more effective than direct mail (Chapman & Jackson, 1987). Specifically, campus visits are viewed as the most useful source of information in making a decision (Carnegie Foundation, 1986), the most effective recruiting activity by college admissions officers and high school counselors (Chapman, 1981), and most influential on final choice (Perrone, in press). Chapman and Jackson (1987) emphasize the importance of the campus visit, stating that students who visit a college tend to choose the visited college.

Timing

In addition to institutional, financial, and personal factors in the college choice process, attention has been given to the timing of the decision-making process. Litten (1982) found that higher ability students begin the formal application process earlier, making a final decision in the fall of their senior year. However, Perrone (in press) found that even 20

percent of high ability students surveyed were undecided on a college as late as April of their senior year.

Summary

Institutional characteristics are the main determinants of college choice for all students selecting a college. Specifically, academic quality or reputation and availability of specific academic programs are most influential. Academically talented students are most attracted to programs in their major fields of interest and in institutions that have high career placement rates and admission rates into professional or graduate schools. Financial constraints are of secondary importance for all students. However, scholarships are positively viewed, and academically talented students are particularly influenced by renewable scholarships. Personal considerations such as parental influence, size and location of the school, and recruitment tactics are influential with personal campus visits often finalizing decisions.

Problem Statement

This study was conducted to examine the college choice process for academically talented students. The University of Wisconsin System and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction were interested in finding out why the brightest students often leave the state to attend college. More specifically, both organizations wanted to know more about the factors that determine college choice. Some possible factors

have been identified as family, friends, finances, and personal considerations. High school teachers, counselors, and administrators may also be determining influences in college selection. High school work may also be viewed as preparation for college and therefore might influence college choice. The timing of the choice may also be a factor in that it might automatically eliminate certain colleges. The recruitment activities of universities and colleges are intended to be influential in determining college choice and should be considered. Finally, the influence of no-need scholarships and honorary awards, specifically the Robert C. Byrd Scholarship and the All State Academic Scholars recognition, were possible influences to be examined.

To discover how these academically talented high school students make their college choices, researchers interviewed the 1987 All State Academic Scholars about (a) factors that helped determine their college choice, (b) their high school programs and college preparation, and (c) the All State Academic Scholars Program.

The intent of the depth interviews was to explore the factors influencing college choice and then to develop propositions related to these factors. The interview schedule was based on the general objectives of the study listed earlier in this section. All interview data were recorded and summarized in a narrative of descriptive analysis supported by direct quotations. Interview summaries were then analyzed to support,

modify, or discount potential propositions. Four groups of three or four researchers met separately to study and analyze the data.

Each of the approximately 23 interviews of a research group provided the data necessary to formulate propositions related to the original objectives of the study. These propositions were tentatively formed by thoroughly reviewing each interview separately. As tentative hypotheses were formed, supportive data as well as negative instances were gleaned from the interviews. After analysis of all interviews, each research group refined working hypotheses into formal propositions supported by evidence from the data. Group propositions were then compiled and synthesized into major propositions and findings.

Methodology

The research study was conducted by trained interviewers. The principal research method was depth interviews. Each interviewer conducted seven interviews to total 91 interviews out of a population of 106 Scholars. All but one of the 106 All State Scholars were in the first year of college when the study was conducted. Each interview averaged approximately 1.5 hours, but ranged from one hour to two hours and forty-five minutes. Whenever possible, interviews were conducted face-to-face. When distance and/or time was a factor, the interviews were conducted by telephone.

Initial contact with the Scholar was made by telephone. An interview time and place convenient for the Scholar was arranged during this initial contact. Each Scholar received a letter

describing the study from the State Superintendent and President of the University of Wisconsin System.

Prior to conducting interviews, interviewers developed an interview schedule and pre-tested it. Questions on the interview schedule were open-ended initially and were focused in the latter sections of the schedule. Questions were asked about the college choice process. Scholars were asked about the timing of various stages of that process. There were also questions about the roles of family, friends, school personnel, colleges and universities, personal considerations, financial considerations, high school preparation, and the All State Academic Scholars recognition and the Byrd Scholarship in the college choice process.

Specifically, All State Scholars were asked for biographical data focusing on their educational histories and those of their family members. They were then asked to discuss their college choice by thinking back to the time when they made their decisions about going to college, and later the specific college. They were asked what role the following individuals played in their decisions and their college choice: family or friends, high school teachers or counselors, and various colleges and universities. They were also asked what role personal considerations, financial considerations, and the All State Academic Scholars recognition or the Byrd Scholarship played in their decisions and their college choice. Scholars were also asked what factors led them to consider or reject a University of

Wisconsin System campus. Finally, Scholars were asked to discuss the depth and breadth of their high school preparation, including its strengths and weaknesses, for the colleges they have chosen.

In terms of college choice itself, Scholars were asked when they first began to think about college choices and what colleges they considered attending. They were asked to describe the process by which they eliminated colleges and any factors that could have changed their minds from the college of preference. Scholars were also asked if any colleges, including the University of Wisconsin, contacted them directly and how influential such contacts were in the college choice process. Questions were also asked about the usefulness of information provided by colleges.

Scholars were asked about specific components of financial aid as influential in the choice process. They were asked how important was the amount of financial aid received in making their college choices. They were also asked about the influence of financial packages offered by institutions. They were also asked about the possible effect of the Byrd Scholarship being expanded to a four-year scholarship for University of Wisconsin students on decisions to attend the University of Wisconsin.

While the interview schedule was topically organized and contained specific questions, its parameters were open-ended -- an interview style in which the interviewer and respondent could elaborate or expand any topic being discussed. Prior to the beginning of each interview, respondents were encouraged to

elaborate and clarify as much as possible on the topics and issues being discussed. After respondents had the opportunity to freely discuss the general topics of the study, probes were used by the interviewer to focus on specific topics of the interview schedule. The questions and answers were summarized in a narrative style and there was no attempt to quantify responses or data in a statistical sense.

After completion of all interviews, the data provided by these interviews was analyzed by the interviewers in research teams. Based on the data, findings were developed consisting of propositions supported by the interviews. Relevant recommendations were also drafted. Findings and recommendations from each research team were synthesized into a final research report.

Findings

Closely following the interview protocol, interviewers asked respondents to discuss what factors entered into their college choice, strengths and weaknesses of their high school preparation programs, and opinions of the Byrd Scholarship and All State Scholars Program.

Family Role

Many people, including family, friends, and school personnel, played a role in the Scholars' college choice. However, no specific group of people was consistently more influential than another. The nature and degree of influence also varied greatly depending upon personal circumstances.

Many Scholars perceived that their college choice had been made independently without undue pressure from parents or other family members. In arriving at their final choice, however, they sought and received support, advice, and direction from their families.

Parents were involved in a number of ways and in varying degrees. Some parents left the decision entirely up to the student while others established criteria and limitations for their children to consider. Some parents were influential in areas including finance, type of school, and specific field of study. Siblings and extended family members also gave advice in some situations. One respondent summarized the varying influence of parents:

> I talked about my college choices mostly with my mom, but I would say my father's influence was stronger regarding what schools I was able to afford. If money was a factor, my father had great influence. Beyond that, it was my choice, and my mom helped me narrow down these choices.

Friends and Counselors

The role of friends in the college choice process was minimal. Scholars often sought information about specific colleges, campuses, and programs from friends who attended them. Most Scholars report, however, that there was "no pressure among friends" to attend the same school. School personnel, especially counselors and teachers, were also seen as sources of information about colleges, scholarships, vocational choice, and specific majors. An exemplary comment about the role of teachers follows:

> My math and choir teachers gave me valuable input, telling me what they knew. They had more influence on me than anyone else. My choir teacher helped me sort things out; he helped sort ideas without adding bias; he helped to clarify things, and he encouraged me.

College and University Contacts

Colleges and universities played a wide variety of roles in assisting students in their college choice. Initial impressions were formed by recruitment mail, and additional information was sought through college handbooks. Choice sets were narrowed through the significant influence of active personalized recruitment. Final decisions were often made on the basis of a personal campus visit. All forms of contact with colleges or universities under consideration were influential, but the key factor in determining final choice was personal attention to the student's area of academic and vocational interest. One Scholar summarized the importance of personal attention:

> Once the universities found out my interests, they sent materials in those areas...I was not impressed by form letters, but if I received a letter which addressed my interest written by the head of the department, that impressed me.

Another student further expressed the feelings of many about active recruitment:

> I was particularly interested in [one specific school] because even in my junior year I received telephone

> calls from previous students all across the United States, in other words, alumni who were aware that I was considering [the school in question], and also professors, current students, and the Registrar's office. All of these personal contacts, by telephone or mail, made a great impression on a junior in high school.

Nearly all students reported a lack of personal contact from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and, in many cases, very strong negative reactions. A typical response was:

> Madison sent me nothing. It was as if they weren't even interested. In fact, they probably wanted to keep their enrollment down.

Another Scholar addressed the issue of a lack of special attention to academically talented students by the University of Wisconsin as follows: "I was receiving no extra recognition or status than the kid who ranked 134th in his class."

Madison's lack of recruitment was sometimes influential in determining final choice. One student commented, "Madison was dropped as a choice in October of my senior year because of the lack of information received." The attitudes of many Scholar's toward Madison's recruitment practices were summarized by one respondent: "Madison needs to get rid of their image that they don't care about quality students during recruitment."

Personal Factors

In making their college decisions, students also took into account personal considerations about the college or university.

Size. The size of the school was judged to be a definitive factor in the final college selection for many students. Respondents were divided fairly equally in their preferences for a large or small school. Students who preferred a small school cited lack of individual attention and feeling of community at a large school as reasons. One Scholar stated, "I wanted a college community to be able to come home to." Students who preferred a large school did so because of the anonymity, diversity, and opportunities unique to a large university. As one respondent said, "With a small school, it is easy to fall into a safe little niche. I wanted a place where there were more open doors."

Distance from Home. Distance from home was also an important factor for many students. Nearness to home was attractive to some students while others viewed more distance from home to be appealing. Preference for distance from home was random. One student summarized the wide variety of attitudes about distance by saying a school should be "out of the city, out of the state, but not too far."

Community of College. Students also considered the size of the community in which a college or university was located and the opportunities it offered. The majority wanted access to a larger city. One student, for example, wanted "...a chance to go to the ballet, opera, symphony."

Cost Considerations

Most students and their families looked closely at the cost of higher education. For all but a few, finance had a

significant influence on college choice. For many this was the most important issue. Tuition costs limited consideration of where some students could go. Parental input in the financial area was considerable. One respondent summarized typical parental influence: "My parents made it very clear, especially my father, that they were only going to pay a maximum of $5,000 a year towards my education."

Another component of the financial factor relates to scholarship or financial assistance offered to students by colleges. Students and their families weighed the relative benefits of accepting financial packages at more expensive schools against tuition at less expensive schools. As one respondent calculated,

> "The financial package offered by [a nationally known school] had a big influence on me as they offered a good sum, like a $12,000 scholarship, plus $2,000 loans and with the Byrd Scholarship, I could afford the school."

Many students indicated that they would not have been able to attend the college they wanted without financial assistance and that these schools made their "financial packages big selling points." On the other hand, schools that offered no financial assistance or scholarships were perceived as not sensitive to student needs. In particular, the University of Wisconsin-Madison was described by a number of Scholars as not helping students financially: "The most negative thing about Madison is that there is not much concern for students financially."

High School Preparation

Most students expressed great satisfaction with their high school academic programs as preparation for college. Students sought out rigorous Advanced Placement (AP) high school programs. A few students, customarily those from small schools, who did not have the opportunity to take Advanced Placement or college preparatory courses, felt the courses would have been helpful preparation for their college experiences. Most students, however, gave their high schools high, favorable marks. Math and science preparation received the most favorable comments.

Byrd Scholarship

The Byrd Scholarship was not a determining influence in college choice and was perceived as an honor rather than a financial award. The primary reason apparently relates to the timing of the award. Most All State Scholars had already made their college choices when the scholarships are announced in April. As one Scholar said, "If given during the first semester of my senior year, it would be more influential (in my college choice)."

Recognition Through the All State Scholars Program

While discussing the financial impact of the Byrd Scholarship, the majority of the respondents also commented on the honor and recognition aspect of the award. Most of the students felt that the recognition was a reward for the hard work they had done during the past four years. One respondent's comment represented the feelings of a majority of Scholars:

I felt that the All State Academic Scholars recognition and the Byrd Scholarship recognized academic achievement and there are not too many recognitions for academics, but there are many for sports.

Family Profiles

The Wisconsin All State Academic Scholars in general came from middle class, socially conservative traditional nuclear families. Important ties with the extended family were evident as members of the extended family often offered advice or personal experiences to aid respondents in the decision-making process. Students also expressed a desire to continue family ties. A typical response concerning college choice and family ties was: "I liked the option that [a particular school] offered -- to be able to come home weekends. I happen to like home." In some cases strong family ties affected college choice. Students sometimes chose a particular school because the whole family or a special family member had gone there.

Early Identification

These students were identified early as academically talented and programmed accordingly. Interest, motivation, and performance were traits that were obvious to school personnel early. These students welcomed intense academic work. One respondent said high school was "no fun," meaning it was "no challenge." These students also began to focus on specific areas of interest while in high school, often taking courses at local colleges. Performing well in all areas, many Scholars ranked at

the top of their classes academically and performed in extracurricular activities.

Early Plans

Early identification and success in academically demanding areas correlated with early preliminary plans to attend college. All State Scholars knew early in life, often in elementary school, that they would go to college. One respondent summarized the attitude of the population to college attendance:

> I always knew I would go on ever since I can remember. My parents, of course, had a lot to do with it. Guess it was just sort of expected. I always knew I would.

In a light-hearted manner, another Scholar spoke of being "doomed to get a Ph.D." This early awareness was gradually refined to seeking information about colleges and programs. After deciding on a choice set of colleges, there followed the application process, then college response, and then final decision about which college to attend.

Early Decisions

The majority of the students began thinking of college choices early in the junior year, with the final decision being made by the middle of the senior year. During the junior year or earlier, Scholars began a systematic gathering of information. For most students, the final choice was made before the last semester of their senior year. In fact, many of the Scholars made their final decisions before the beginning of their senior

year. One respondent's selection process was representative of the majority:

> I began narrowing colleges down in eleventh grade. I talked extensively with my high school counselor and received many catalogues on various colleges. My final decision was made in my senior year.

Reputation of College

Students sought specific information about colleges and universities in making their selection. Sources and types of information varied, but Scholars wanted to know specifics. Students were particularly interested in sources of information that ranked colleges and expressed a desire to attend an institution placed high in the ratings. Students were also interested in determining the general academic reputation of students at top-ranked institutions. As one All State Scholar said:

> There are several statistics that I looked for. For example, the top ten percent of graduating classes attending various universities and the percentage of those students in those universities. I also looked at the SAT test scores of those universities and probably just the general overall hearsay of the reputation of the various schools.

As a result of looking at publications, rankings, and specific statistics about colleges and universities, Scholars developed a concept that would constitute an acceptable choice for them.

Scholars identified that concept as the "reputation" of the institution.

Most respondents mentioned academic reputation as one of the most important or the most important factor in determining college choice. Scholars' perceptions of what constitutes the academic reputation of a college or university included several components such as reputation of professors, research opportunities, challenge of course work, prestige, and the recognition of the school's name. One respondent wanted to attend school where "the professors who wrote the textbooks" were teaching. Another respondent made a final college choice based on "the research and projects I'll have an opportunity to work on."

Other Scholars were looking in more general terms at the overall prestige of a school and recognition of its name. Some Scholars were interested specifically in Ivy League schools.

Reputation of an institution might best be summarized as being known for providing a challenge academically through high standards. All State Scholars clearly sought the academically rigorous programs.

Career Goals. Other students viewed the perceived reputations of various colleges as having a positive impact on their potential career success following graduation. The majority of students had determined their career goals and were looking for specific schools and programs to assist them in realizing these goals. One respondent stated the philosophy of many: "The major first, then the best college for that major."

Many Scholars conducted a carefully planned search for the best schools in a particular field. Some of them stated that they were not interested in the quality of the other programs at the school as long as the career choice had a strong program. As one respondent stated, "I knew if the sciences are good, the rest would be good, too." For some, commitment to a particular vocational choice determined which colleges or universities would be considered. Scholars also looked closely at the rate of job placement and admission to graduate school as important career factors in choosing a school. One respondent typically stated:

> I felt strongly that the reputation of the school and the degree you receive plays an important part in the mind of the employer.

Another respondent defined strong pre-med programs as those that are successful in getting students into medical school.

Relationship of Cost and Reputation. Though some students were interested in cost-effectiveness, financial considerations were secondary to the institution's academic reputation. In some cases, the cost of a program was important, but only if the quality was there too. Generally, however, students would find the financial means to attend a university thought to provide the best program. Scholars weighed total financial packages in the form of scholarships and loans against more expensive tuition. With financial packages, the more expensive school was often chosen over the less expensive school if its program was thought to be superior.

Personal Attention

The final consideration that the All State Scholars sought was personal attention. This fact is well documented by the comments Scholars made about personalized recruitment and the desire to receive personal attention in smaller classes. Students tended to choose the school that gave them the greatest personal attention in a final choice set. One respondent summarized the importance of this factor:

> I would say that all things were equal except the personal contact and the way in which we were handled at campus visits. That really had an impact on me.

Recommendations for Policy and Programs

The study suggests a number of actions that would help to keep academically talented students from leaving the state. If academically talented students are to be kept at state universities, active recruitment will be necessary. A recruitment program should be built upon the beliefs that the state university has (a) an excellent reputation, (b) offers a cosmopolitan environment, (c) provides a wide range of majors, and (d) supplies a good education at relatively low cost. Such a program could make a difference in retaining top scholars within the state system.

Early Recruitment

Recruitment efforts need to be directed at academically talented students early in their high school years. Initial

recruitment efforts should begin with early identification of academically talented students well before the junior year and certainly no later than December of their junior year of high school.

Focused and Direct Marketing Efforts

Because these students believe that selection of a college comes from their own decision-making process, colleges wishing to influence that selection should appeal to them directly. Schools should personalize their letters of invitation to underscore factors that influence selection. The academic quality of the school, its specific programs, and post-graduate opportunities should be emphasized in mailings or personal contact.

Recruitment brochures and catalogues should include factors that are most appealing to academically talented students. For example, quotes from successful students and alumni should accompany interesting pictures depicting campus life. Successful graduates in fields of major study should be highlighted in all promotional literature.

Identify Personal Contacts

Attention should be given to the fact that some groups potentially influence college choice and the influence of those groups can be utilized. Influence of older siblings and older peers can be enlisted. Family influence is significant since many students appear to follow family members' leads in type of college selected. To improve a university's reputation and

prestige, the university should increase efforts to match alumni with academically talented students and do a direct marketing program to both the alumni and students.

Promote Academic Reputation

Reputation should be emphasized in all promotional literature, including positive academic aspects of the institution and the accomplishments of particular professors.

Employ a Personal Touch

Personalized invitations should be extended to groups of students to visit the campus. High school teachers should receive information about college and university programs in their content areas. Teachers especially should be updated on innovative programs at the university in their specific fields of interest.

The recruitment process needs to be expanded, be personalized, and be timely in responding to letters of inquiry.

After interested academically talented students have been identified, heads of departments, alumni, and students should make personal contacts by telephone or letter with the students. A personalized invitation to visit with these individuals should then be extended to the student and his/her family.

Personalized campus visits are recommended. Campus officials or faculty members from departments of student choice should conduct tours of the campus and its facilities. Positive features of the campus and accomplishments of faculty and programs should be stressed.

Stress Career Interests

Recruitment efforts should be directed toward specific career goals of students. This could be accomplished by personal visits with department heads as well as techniques such as slides, tapes, and videos. Accessibility to the university should be expanded by hosting academic honors programs and competitions for K-12 students.

Confront the Size Issue

Since small class size and smaller campuses attract many students, larger institutions need to "personalize" their environments if they are to be attractive to more students. Academically talented students should be provided with information to change their perceptions of a large, impersonal institution. They could also be guaranteed smaller-sized classes taught by professors. Indeed, an expanded honors program would also be attractive to these students. Allowing them to register early, guaranteeing them certain classes, and enrolling them in small honors classes would provide the recognized significance of their academic accomplishments.

Once specific programs are publicized and these students express an interest in them, their lower price tag can be contrasted with similar programs at other schools in order to enhance the perceptions of "cost-effectiveness."

Demystify Scholarships

Better attention needs to be given to scholarships for this group. Since students sometimes do not have access to

scholarship information, a central source of information about scholarships should be established which can be tapped by all students seeking financial help.

To remain competitive, colleges and universities should provide and publicize non-need based scholarships to recognize academically successful students. Multi-year scholarships at public institutions should cover a greater proportion of expenses so that they can remain competitive with those offered by private institutions. The offering of these scholarships needs to be made in the first semester of the senior year at the latest.

Assure Excellent High School Preparation

Since students often need higher level skills to be accepted into some college or university programs, high schools should continue to make advanced level courses available. If small high schools are to meet the needs of these students, they need to provide access to advanced courses as well.

Conduct Further Research

Additional research is needed to refine the choice process by which academically talented students choose colleges and universities.

The methodology of this study suggests additional areas of research. The use of depth interviews could be expanded to include other academically talented students such as National Merit finalists and semi-finalists, high school seniors who rank at the top of their classes, and those who have high scores on

the ACT, SAT, and PSAT. Since parents, friends, and high school counselors and teachers were identified as being somewhat influential, these groups could also be interviewed to determine the nature and extent of their influence in college choice. Interviews with these groups could assist in refining the factors that contribute to college choice for academically talented students.

The timing of the college choice process needs further research. Specifically, the time frame in which academically talented students made their college choices needs to be refined. The apparent early timing has significant implications for college and university recruitment efforts.

Renewability of aid has been found to have an impact on final college choice (Chapman & Jackson, 1987). However, further research would refine the impact of renewable aid as it compares to lower tuition.

Reputation of a college or university was found to be the primary determinant of college choice in this study and virtually every other study reviewed. The concept of academic reputation needs further refinement to determine those components that most significantly influence academically talented students. Refinement of this concept would directly assist marketing efforts of colleges and universities in recruitment of academically talented students.

The "brain drain" issue requires further research. Any state, Wisconsin in this case, concerned about losing its best

and brightest students to other states needs to discover the proportion of academically talented students leaving the state to those who are coming in from out of state. Quantitative research methods would best answer this question and provide a broader picture across the country.

Quantitative research methods might also provide a more reliable model of college choice, generalizable to the population of academically talented students. Refinement of such a model is needed to fill the dearth of research in this area.

These recommendations are representative of actions that could be taken to better serve and to keep academically talented students at home. Adopting some or all of these ideas might help to prevent the future "brain drain" of academically talented students to other states.

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